

Testimony of the Honorable Debbie Dingell (MI-06)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Member Day Hearing

April 18, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, for holding this hearing for members to highlight their priorities in the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure for the 118th Congress.

Today, I would like to focus specifically on my key priorities related to our nation's airports as the Committee considers important reauthorization legislation for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

As you know, the current authorization (Public Law No: 115-254) for the FAA expires at the end of fiscal year 2023. In order to ensure our civil aviation system—the most complex air transportation system in the world—does not endure any disruptions to operations, safety, or efficiency, we will need to work together, Republicans and Democrats, to advance meaningful, bipartisan reauthorization legislation.

Since I have been in office, one of my highest priorities has been working across the aisle to address the crisis of “forever chemical” facing communities in every district across the United States. This is a bipartisan problem and deserves bipartisan solutions.

Forever chemicals—known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)—are harmful man-made chemicals that have so far been found in the drinking water of more than 2,000 communities across almost

every state in the country, in everyday consumer products, and nearly 400 military sites across the United States have identified harmful PFAS contamination, according to the Environmental Working Group. PFAS chemicals are persistent, bio-accumulative, and toxic. These chemicals have been linked to harmful human health effects, including cancer, reproductive and developmental harms, and weaken immune systems.

We know nearly every American now has some level of PFAS coursing through their blood after generations of uses to create our modern society.

For decades now, one of the main sources of PFAS contamination into the environment has been from both military and civilian airports. Due to government regulations and the effectiveness of forever chemicals used in emergency response, airports nation wide have been required to stock, train, and use aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF), a type of foam used to fight fires, which contain high levels of PFAS.

In order to protect human health and our environment it is critical for our nation's airports to transition from AFFF to PFAS-free firefighting foam alternatives as soon as possible. Congress has acted but we need to do more to solidify this transition.

For instance, in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Congress required the Department of Defense to update firefighting foam standards by January 31, 2023, and are also known as military specifications, or mil spec. The Federal Aviation Administration requires U.S. civilian airports to meet the military's standards.

The Department of Defense updated those standards on January 6, 2023. On January 12, 2023, the FAA issued an alert stating it will accept the use of foams at airports that meet the new mil spec requirements. Airports will be able to purchase fluorine-free foams as soon as foams meeting the mil spec are added to the U.S. Navy's qualified product list, which should happen in the coming months.

That same law also required the Department of Defense to stop buying PFAS-based foams by October 1, 2023, and stop using them entirely by October 1, 2024.

While the FAA and the Department of Defense continue to research safe, PFAS-free firefighting foam alternatives, there is still harmful AFFF in use today at U.S. airports. The time is now to get serious and ensure the safe transition to safer alternative at our nation's airports to protect our first responders, the public, and our environment.

Therefore, I would strongly urge the members of this Committee to consider including a provision in any FAA reauthorization legislation that would explicitly state that no airport, not later than three years after the date of enactment of this legislation, shall be eligible for federal funding until such an airport has transitioned to the use of fluorine-free firefighting foam for all airport rescue and firefighting activities, including but not limited to fire emergencies, training, and equipment testing.

Thank you in advance for considering this request as the Committee moves forward with hearings, legislation, and markups to advance a bipartisan FAA reauthorization for the years ahead.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, please contact me or my staff. I stand ready to work with the Committee in any capacity to include these priorities, which will help strengthen our air transportation system in the United States, as well as protect human health and our environment for generations to come.

Thank you.